

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 ACDA-07 SAJ-01 OMB-01 MCT-01 IO-13 /089 W

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R 140836Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 218

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

CINCPAC

S E C R E T MANILA 14090

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, RP

SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE PRESS ALLEGES COMMUNIST-MUSLIM REBEL
CONNECTION

REF: MANILA 13335

BEGIN SUMMARY: SERIES OF ARTICLES IN DAILY EXPRESS HAS
RECEIVED CONTENTION THAT MUSLIM AND COMMUNIST REBELS ARE
ACTIVELY COOPERATING. ARTICLES, WHICH BEGAN AS PART OF
CAMPAIGN TO LINK COMMUNISTS WITH "CHRISTIAN LEFT" IS
CLEARLY RELATED TO GOP ANXIETY LEST ANIT-COMMUNIST VIGILANCE
BE RELAXED IN WAKE OF CAPTURE OF TOP NPA LEADERS. ARTICLES
ALLEGEDLY ALIA THAT COMMUNIST LEADER SISON MET WITH
MNLF CHAIRMAN NUR MISUARI IN 1975 IN UNDISCLOSED COUNTRY
SOUTH OF PHILIPPINES. EMBASSY IS SKEPTICAL ABOUT THIS
REPORT. REGARDING BROADER ISSUE OF NPA-MNLF COLLABORATION,
MNLF HAS CONSISTENTLY DENIED THAT IT IS TAKING PLACE, OUT
OF FEAR OF OFFENDING ISLAMIC CONSERVATIVES AT HOME AND
ABROAD. EMBASSY KNOWS OF ONLY ONE CASE OF LOW-LEVEL
NPA-MNLF COLLABORATION IN RECENT MONTHS. WE ARE INCLINED

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TO BELIEVE THAT HISTORICAL ANIMOSITY BETWEEN MUSLIMS

AND CHRISTIANS IN SOUTH REMAINS EFFECTIVE BARRIER
AGAINST COLLUSION, REGARDLESS OF HOW MUCH COMMUNIST
LEADERSHIP MIGHT WELCOME IT. END SUMMARY.

1. SERIES OF GOP-INSPIRED ARTICLES IN DAILY EXPRESS HAS
RECEIVED CONTENTION THAT COMMUNIST NPA (NEW PEOPLES ARMY)
IS COOPERATING ACTIVELY WITH MUSLIM REBEL MNLF (MORO
NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT). SERIES BEGAN AS EXTENSION
OF "EXPRESS" ATTACK ON CHRISTIAN LEFT (REFTEL). IN
SEPT 12-13 INSTALLMENTS IT ALLEGES THAT COMMUNISTS
INITIATED LINKS WITH MUSLIMS AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME
THAT THEY BEGAN WOOING CHURCH RADICALS. CITING MILITARY
SOURCES, ARTICLE SAYS THAT COMMUNIST LEADER JOSE MARIA
SISON MET WITH MNLF CHARMAN NUR MISUARI "IN EARLY
1975 IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY SOUTH OF THE PHILIPPINES TO
DISCUSS PLANS FOR A JOINT OFFENSIVE." ACCORDING ARTICLE,
THIS CONCERTED PLAN OF ACTION NEVER MATERIALIZED ON
THE SCALE ENVISIONED DUE TO COMMUNICATIONS AND LOGISTICS
DIFFICULTIES COMPOUNDED BY DWINDLING SUPPORT FROM
FOREIGN BACKERS. HOWEVER, ARTICLE CONTINUWS, MILITARY
BELIEVES THAT FLAREUP OF SMALL-UNIT ACTIONS IN MARCH-
APRIL LAST YEAR RESULTED FROM "DESPERATE BUT UNSUCCESS-
FUL ATTEMPT TO PUT THE JOINT OFFENSIVE INTO ACTION".
SEPTEMBER 12 INSTALLMENT CONCLUDES WITH UNSUALLY
DETAILED ENUMERATION OF "NPA-MNLF ATROCITIES" IN
MINDANAO. IN FACT, ALL THE INCIDENTS LISTED APPEAR TO
HAVE BEEN RESULT OF UNILATERAL MUSLIM INSURGENCY OR
TERRORISM.

3. FINAL ARTICLE IN SERIES REVERTS TO MORE ORTHODOX
ALLEGATION OF EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE TO "NMLF LEFT" EXERTED
THROUGH FOUR "ISLAMIC MISSIONARIES" TRAINED IN MIDDLE
EAST AND FINANCED BY LIBYA.

4. COMMENT. UNTIL EVE OF RELATIONS WITH PRC IN JUNE
1975, GOP REGULARLY DEPICTED MNLF LEADERS AS "MAOIST
MUSLIMS." THAT LINE WAS DROPPED FOR OBVIOUS REASONS.
CHARGE OF MUSLIM-COMMUNIST COOPERATION (MINUS
REFERENCE TO THE CHINESE CONNECTION) HAS NOW BEEN
REVIVED FOLLOWING CAPTURE OF TOP NPA LEADERS DANTE AND
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CORPUS. "EXPRESS" ARTICLES ARE CLEARLY INTENDED AS
FOLLOWUP TO GEN. VER'S EXHORTATION NOT TO RELAX GUARD
AGAINST MORE MILITANT "THIRD ECHELON" COMMUNISTS STILL
AT LARGE. HOWEVER, GOP'S LINKAGE OF COMMUNISTS WITH
MUSLIMS IS IF ANYTHING EVEN LESS CONVINCING THAN ITS
SIMULTANEOUS EFFORTS TO TAR "CHRISTIAN LEFT" WITH
COMMUNIST BRUSH.

5. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT NPA WOULD LIKE TO FORGE COMMON FRONT WITH MUSLIM REBELS IN SOUTH. FOR ONE THING, MUSLIMS ARE MUCH BETTER ARMED AND MIGHT BE PERPARED TO SHARE WEAPONS. COOPERATION WITH THEM WOULD JIBE NEATLY WITH STANDARD UNITED FRONT TACTICS. HOWEVER, MNLF LEADERS (INCLUDING NUR MISUARI) HAVE IN PAST VEHEMENTLY DISCLAIMED ANY COMMUNIST CONNECTION, OUT OF WELL-FOUNDED IDEA THAT SUCH ALLIANCE WOULD DEEPLY OFFEND NOT ONLY MIDDLE EASTERN PATRONS, BUT ALSO CONSERVATIVE VILLAGE-LEVEL ISLAMIC LEADERS IN PHILIPPINES (SEE MANILA'S A-80 OF 3/14/75). FOR MINDANAO IT REMAINS A TRUISM THAT HISTORICAL ANIMOSITY BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIAN IMMIGRANTS (WHO ARE NPA'S PRIMARY CONSTITUENCY) MAKE EFFECTIVE COOPERATION EXTREMELY DIFFICULT IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE.

6. GIVEN FACT THAT MNLF IS ANYTHING BUT A COHESIVE OR DISCIPLINED ORGANIZATION, IF INDEED IT QUALIFIES AS AN ORGANIZATION AT ALL, COOPERATION WITH COMMUNISTS COULD HAVE TAKEN PLACE DESPITE CONSTRAINTS MENTIONED ABOVE. HOWEVER, THUS FAR, EMBASSY KNOWS OF ONLY ONE CONFIRMED CASE IN RECENT MONTHS. THIS TOOK PLACE AT LOCAL LEVEL (LANAO DEL SUR), COULD WELL HAVE BEEN BYPRODUCT OF BRIBERY, AND IS NOT NEARLY ENOUGH TO SUPPORT "EXPRESS" ALLEGATION OF MORE WIDESPREAD COLLUSION. WE HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE OF ALLEGED NJR-SISON MEETING AND ARE INCLINED TO REGARD THIS WITH SKEPTICISM GIVEN GOP'S KNOWN PROPENSITY TO FLOAT DISINFORMATION ABOUT NUR (FOR EXAMPLE, THE MARCH 1976 PRESS REPORT THAT HE WAS UNDER HOUSE ARREST IN LIBYA FOR MISUSE OF FUNDS, WHICH WAS TOTALLY FALSE). EMBASSY WILL OF COURSE CONTINUE TO MONITOR POSSIBLE INDICATIONS OF MNLF-NPA COLLUSION. SULLIVAN

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